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Teaching and technology: The EFL context

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Abstract

The present day society is expected to be paralysed in the absence of technology. As a school or a college is a miniature society, the need of technology in educational sector can never be ignored for many genuine reasons. Educational technology has been in active use for a long time especially in most modern educational institutions. But, the emergence of the novel concept of pedagogy forced pedagogues to think on daily basis regarding innovations, modernization and development of learning-teaching scenario. E-learning provides various opportunities to enhance educational development leading to technological sophistication and finally economic uplift. E-learning can play a critical role in preparing modern teachers equipped with sophisticated/learning tools. It has been noticed that effective implementation of e-learning is not possible without teacher's attitude, readiness and appropriate training. The present paper discusses the importance of training in e-learning for teacher's professional development (in this context: e-training) as part of a pedagogic strategy for successful implementation of e-learning/e-resource and academic achievement. The purpose of this paper is to raise and tackle some of the training issues and components for the in-service teachers for effective utilization of e-resource and achievement of educational objectives. The study will equally benefit the future teachers of English in particular in a way that they will prepare themselves in advance to face similar situation if the need arises.

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1. Introduction

Teaching was initially defined as an art. Later it was re-defined as a science. At present, teaching is more like an instruction that too integrated with sophisticated technology. Each modern English classroom is equipped with necessary e-resources to lighten the burden of education. It gives an easy time to the target learners as they think they are in a friendly environment where they learn through playing or doing certain activities.

The importance of e-learning can't be ignored as it has emerged as a worldwide phenomenon in the field of pedagogy. Therefore, the teachers are supposed to be able to use and utilize the e-resources available in an

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institution. The provision of latest e-resources, tools and training of those who would utilize the e-resources are important tasks of management. (Khan, 2011, 2012)

E-training can be operationally be defined as preparation and equipment of e- instructors so that they are able to utilize and implement e-learning program of education. It is basically a training scenario derived from the electronic concepts: hardware and software either online or offline. As e-training is carried out for effective implementation of e-learning all the components and dimensions remain the same, and falls under the head of teacher in service education/continuous development. The need and importance of e-learning is as crucial as the educational enhancement in the present educational scenario. Its practical relevance has grown to a tremendous level in the field of education / training or to put more appropriately ‘pedagogy’. E-learning can be achieved without effective e-training of the concerned teachers.

2. The research context

The review of the literature shows technology integration requires that teachers must first become comfortable with their own computer use and their access to and use of computer technology must be supported by school administration. There can be many advantages to improving student literacy by better supporting teachers in their computer using needs. Teachers’ and their students’ access to well-equipped computer and supported labs as part of a school-wide computer literacy curriculum prove to be a greater

benefit than a traditional classroom. Computer and technology literacy is the ‘ability to use, manage, understand and assess that technology (Emeagwali, 2004, p.16). Presently, most modern classrooms are equipped with educational technology as there is a growing need of in-service training or professional development especially for e-teaching.

Several studies have focused on innovative and compatible pedagogy for both offline and online teaching. Partlow and Gibbs (2003). Keeton (2004) investigated effective online instructional practices based on a framework of effective teaching practices in face-to-face instruction in higher education.

3. The present study

The present study is initially based on personal experience of the teacher-researcher, therefore the approach is more like a case study of King Abdulaziz University Community college at Jeddah-Saudi Arabia. The research is of qualitative-descriptive type. Case study method has been followed to explore the dimensions of e-training. An observatory approach has been followed to support the data gathered through the questionnaires administered on the concerned sample of English teachers.

3.1.Objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To explore the relevance of technology in teaching,
- to study the attitude of the learners and teachers towards educational technology in the EFL context, -
- to assess e-learning materials,
- to ascertain the use of ‘off and on line’ materials in teaching and learning.

4. A journey from ‘blackboard’ to ‘smart board’

Though there are still many schools which use traditional methods of teaching such as the use of blackboards and white chalks (due to the lack of infrastructure and resources), most modern classrooms are generally equipped with many sophisticated electronic tools that include:

Computers, projectors, smart boards, CD players, internet, computer assisted language labs etc.

E-learning is said to be the most urgent device used for information sharing process during which the teacher plays the only role of a facilitator. The following images are some that show the availability and utilization of the e-resource at Community college-KAU, Jeddah in order to foster teaching-learning activities.



Figure 1. A view of language lab

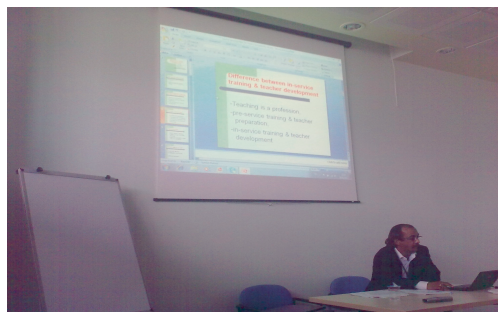


Figure 2. A computer assisted class room



Figure 3. King Abdulaziz University electronic learning system

There are many ways a teacher can use online learning tools especially when the target learners face problems in learning the target subjects. The following is an example of the methods as to how a teacher can teach the meaning and sound of a target word:

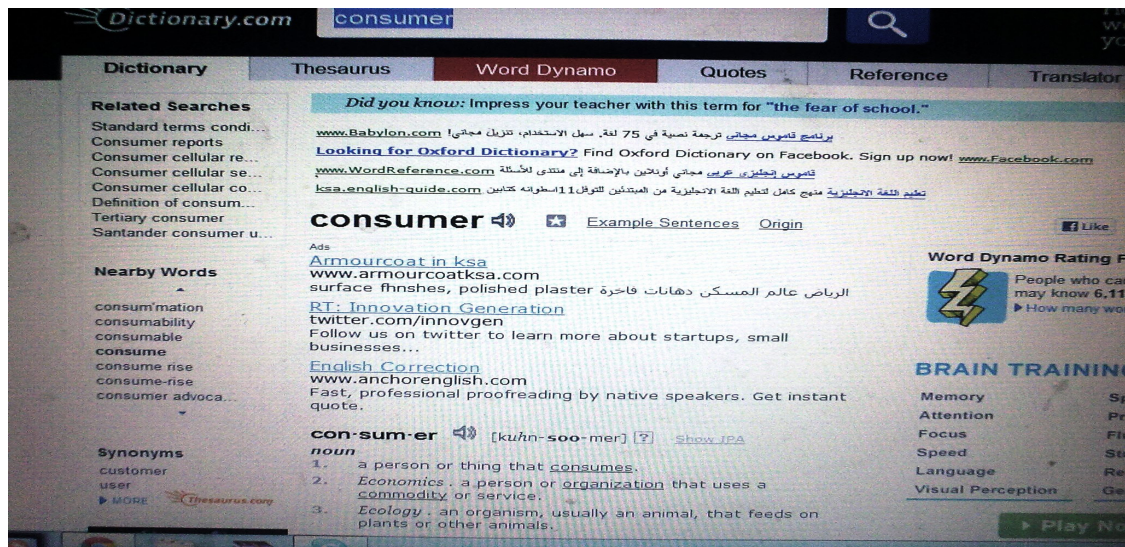


Figure 4. Online dictionary resource

If the meaning of the synonyms of the target words doesn't help the learners to grasp the meaning, the teacher can browse for the translation or the related images and vice versa. The following page can be an apt example:

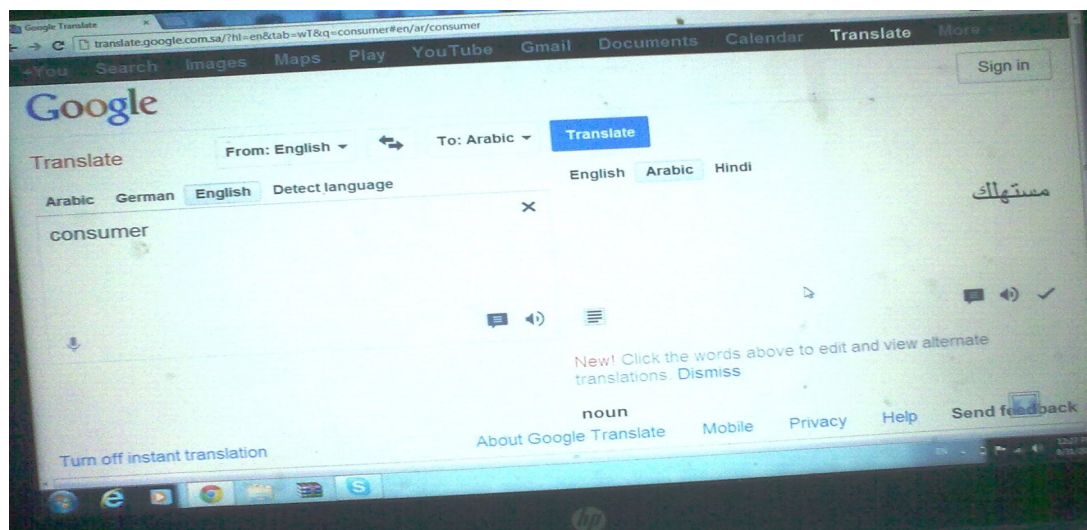


Figure 5. Google translate page

The images are highly significant in the learning-teaching of the target words or related concepts. Since the online facility is available, there is no need that the teacher tries other techniques and waste time.

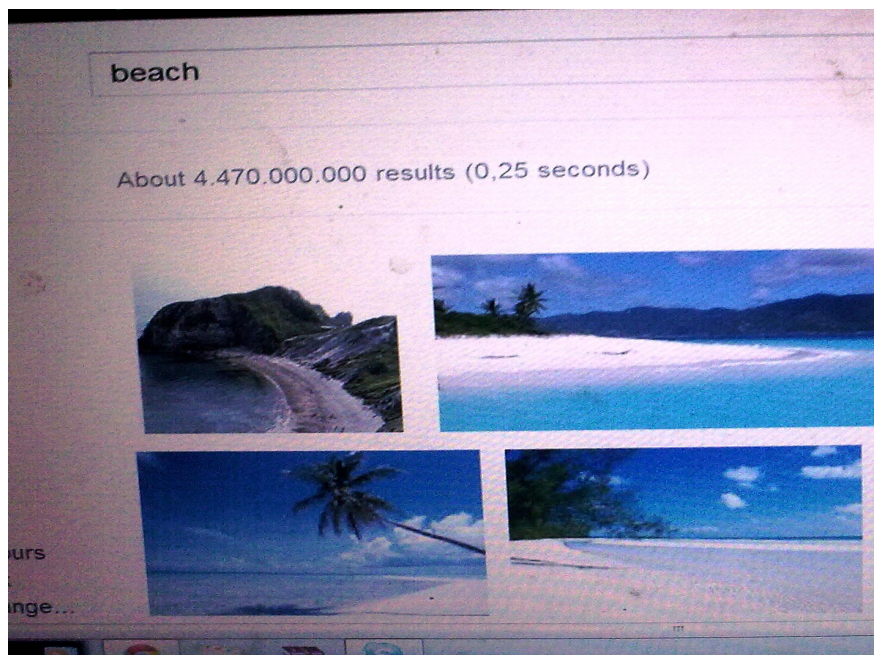


Figure 6. Google.image

Apart from the pedagogic use of the images, translation and dictionary, if a teacher or a learner wants to practise listening/speaking, he can brows YouTube page and find the topics of his choice.

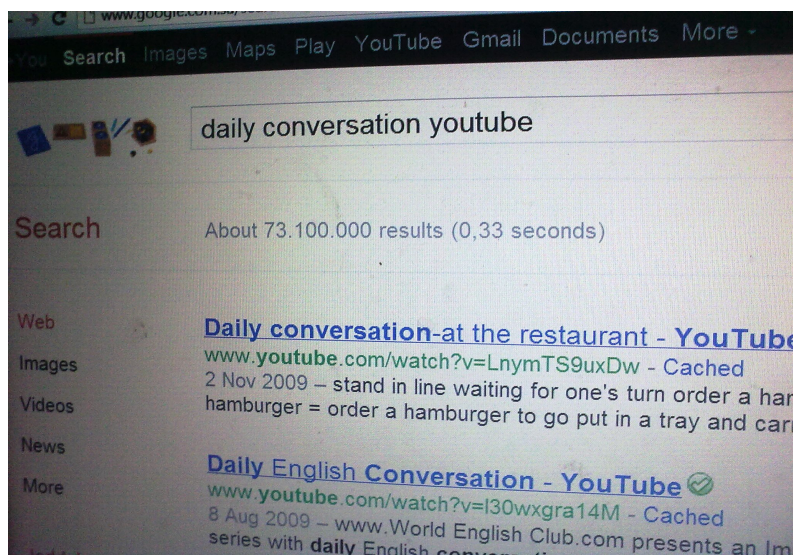


Figure 7. YouTube page

5. Need of teacher's e- training and implementation of technology

In order to utilize the e-learning resources, both the teachers and learners need to get trained. Most of the existing staff has already been trained in the educational technology/e-learning who later train the target learners to utilize the available e-resources.

5.1. Blended learning

Blended learning is used as a strategy of teaching. It emerges out of the blend of the two methods: traditional and modern. It involves the use of the Web with regular classroom-based learning. In a blended learning environment, students use online resources and tools and also attend face-to-face classes. In general, blended learning activities usually include:

- integration of Web-based resources in one's traditional teaching;
- production and implementation of Web pages for a specific classroom; and
- use of online facilities/tool such as forums, discussions, chatting, online assignment, quizzes etc.

6. Analysis, results and findings

6.1. Teachers' perception on e-training/e-learning

Based on the data gathered through the teachers' questionnaires, the following tabular and graphical presentation lead to the analysis presented below:

Table 1. Perception of teachers on e-training

S.N	Statements	Agreed	undecided	disagreed
1	I have you been using e-learning for many months.	10	-	4
2	I have already attended e-training.	11	-	3
3	JCC is self sufficient in the field of e-learning..	8	2	4
4	I often need a technical support for e-learning integration.	7	2	5
5	I can design and upload e-contents.	8	3	3
6	Students are provided orientation program for implementation of e-learning.	14	-	-
7	On line learning is of great importance these days.	11	1	2
8	My college is well equipped with labs, classes and offices.	14	-	-
9	The administration provides required support for implementation of e-resource.	12	1	1
10	Every single teacher must go through intensive e-training for effective implementation of e-resources.	13	-	1

Most of the teachers have positive response towards the e-learning mode. They also opine that the college is equipped with the sophisticated e-resources, and the e-learning has been nicely blended with the traditional methods for various reasons including the teachers' training and preparation. However, there is a growing awareness among the teachers that the practicing teachers must continue to develop themselves as equipped professionals. Despite the positive attitude towards technology integration and an attraction towards blended

learning environment, it was also observed that there existed hesitation and doubts regarding the realization of goals. Some teachers were not computer friendly, but they wanted to be.

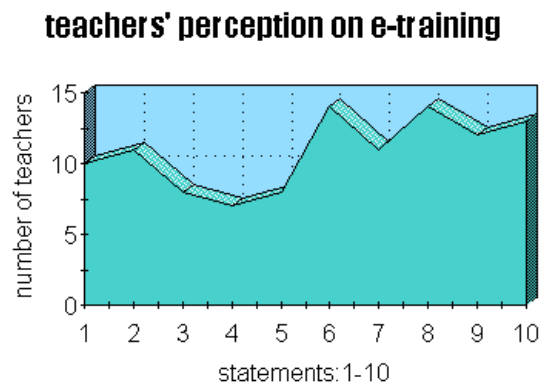


Figure 8. Showing teachers' perception on e-training

6.2. Analysis of the students' questionnaires

Table 2. Students' questionnaires

SN	STATEMENTS	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	My English teacher use computers in classes?	29	8	9
2	He uses internet to show and explain something?	24	9	13
3	My teacher tells me how to use websites?	22	8	16
4	I usually use websites at home to complete some assignments?	32	6	8
5	I always use your mobile to check spelling and meaning?	36	5	5
6	I would like to have teacher's instruction via mails?	15	14	17
7	Power-point presentation is better than writing on the board?	23	9	14
8	I use your university's electronic system (EMES)?	22	18	6
9	I use laptop more than mobile like i-phones.	15	13	18
10	E-learning is better than old learning system.	21	14	11

students opinion on technongy

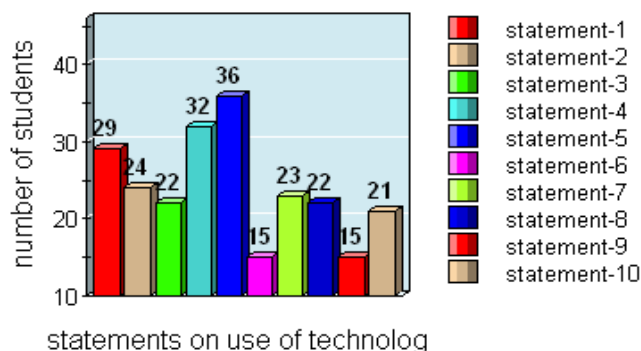


Figure 8.

6.2.1. Analysis and interpretation

Based on the responses on the students' questionnaires, it was found that most of their teachers use online/e-learning material. The students are also interested in learning through e-learning/blended mode. The college has almost all the required infrastructure and human resource to accomplish the target of modern learning of English language.

7. Conclusion

In summary, it can be stated that technology is of high importance in the present pedagogic context. As most of the Saudi learners are quite computer friendly, they have easy access of laptops, i-phones etc, they are found enjoying learning English through informal modes of education. Therefore, it is required to incorporate the e-resources in the traditional teaching methods to retain the learning interest of the learner. It also gives an impression that the learners are not burdened with the books, homework etc. On the other hand, they may complete such online task without having a feeling of doing something in particular. Technology and teaching are integrated especially in the modern teaching context. A teacher must implement technology in general and online learning in particular to make the teaching-learning as interesting activity in a very friendly environment.

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